

Reading in a Cultural Context

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Reading in a Cultural Context

This course consists of Five Units. Each unit has some readings with exercises for the student to do.

Unit One	Reading and Comprehension
Unit Two	Responding to Written Material
Unit Three	Assessment
Unit Four	Program Management
Unit Five	Putting it all together--Final Project

To the student

If you should feel blank while reading these materials, stop. Go back to where you felt you understood the reading. There will be a word that you did not completely understand. Find it and use a dictionary to get the most appropriate meaning for the context of this reading. Reread any material after that for 100% understanding.

If you have any questions about this course, always check with the instructor.
Confusion tends to be contagious.

Unit One--Reading and Comprehension

This unit is written in sections. At the end of each section, do the exercises and write your answers in a notebook. Some of these exercises may be done in class with your study group.

Before you begin your reading, please list the **Goals** and **Purposes** you have for students to read.

Example

Goals (What students will gain)

(1) Students read a variety of texts, some for pleasure & some for information

(2) Students understand what they read

etc.

Purposes (Why you want students to have these goals)

(1) To gain more information

(2) To have more fun

(3) To learn more

etc.

Introduction

There are several reasons to re-examine the subject of reading. For one, reading test scores have declined steadily since WW2. For another, the demands of literacy have increased with the advent of technology. Finally, due to changes in the economy, there are growing numbers of children living in poverty who are now attending schools. This text examines the history, causes, and effects of these trends, and it proposes workable solutions for classrooms. The principles presented here will enhance any reading program or method.

A Brief History of Schools and Reading Instruction

Origins

Our concept of schools comes from the ancient Greeks. They also gave us our alphabet and one major approach to literacy instruction. While surrounding groups, such as the Phoenicians, had writing systems, these symbols were primarily used to record business transactions. This suited the needs of those groups at that time. The Greeks were the first to use written language to record the thoughts of people, and this new technology revolutionized the world.

Prior to writing, history was transmitted through oral recitations. In Greek culture the primary transmitters of oral history were the poets. Ancient Greek poems contained both history and important cultural values. These oral qualities are retained in the Homeric Epics. Writing soon, however, replaced these oral traditions among “free Greeks,” particularly in Athens.

Athens was the birthplace of Greek democracy. One of the most important functions of this form of government was the ability to persuade. This was an oral ability, however, not a written one. This format of persuasion, or rhetoric (the art of persuasion) laid the foundations for “school” writing. Additionally, schools sprang up to train “free” Greek boys to participate in this forum.

These early schools concentrated primarily on language training. Young boys, ages 8 to 12, studied grammar or the structure of the Greek language. This skill added to their eloquence as a speaker. The pedagogical or teaching methods was primarily drilling. Because of the still primary oral uses of language, memorization was stressed. Students also learned to read so that they could be familiar with the works of the “masters,” or the great philosophers and thinkers of their time. These ideas would then become the sources for formal arguments. This system evolved into current academic or school uses of language, for example quoting and citing sources in research papers.

The Greek approach to teaching reading was the alphabet system, roughly equivalent to the phonics approach. This worked extremely well because the Greek alphabet, of course, was invented to represent the sounds of the Greek language. Hence, there was a one-to-one correspondence between the symbol and the sound it represented. In fact, this was so easy that only slaves taught elementary school.

Once the students were older, they began reading the works of historians, scientists, and philosophers for the purpose of debating their ideas. Reading was done aloud to each other. No one read silently or by themselves. Thus, reading was used to provide ideas for debate and oral persuasion. Older boys also practiced their oratory skills through debates. Schools additionally took on the function of disseminating new ideas, a function still held by most curriculums and reinforced by standardized testing.

Exercise

Write a short summary of the origins of schools. Add any other aspects of modern schooling that you believe also descended from the ideas of the Ancient Greeks.

Further Reading

Berlin, J.A. (1984). *Writing instruction in nineteenth-century American colleges*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.

Golden, J.L., Berquest, G.F. & Coleman, W.E. (1978). *The rhetoric of western thought*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Matthews, M.M. (1966). *Teaching to read: Historically considered*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Changes/The Role of Sociology & Psychology

Early schools, then, concentrated on training gentlemen in the art of oratory and the dissemination of new ideas. Greek oratory or the art of persuasion still dominated the teaching of literacy. This approach remained even in schools in this country until after the Civil War. In fact, the famous Choctaw Academy founded for the education of Choctaw youth followed this basic curriculum approach. Beginning in the late 1800's, curriculums began to change. These changes reflected the change from a basically agrarian economy to an industrial one. The new "middle" class began to gain both political and economic power. This group demanded that schools prepare their sons for business.

This, of course, meant reading for new purposes. In the past, an educated person read to gain ideas for purposes of oratory. In fact, this older system remains in prep schools, or schools that prepare "gentlemen" and now "ladies" for success in universities and colleges. What the middle class wanted was more practical reading and writing, such as memos, letters, resumes, and manuals. Even today, the highest paid positions for composition teachers remains within large business, training executives how to communicate successfully through writing. As a result of the growing middle-class, schools became flooded with children who had no need to publicly debate ideas but who needed to read to survive.

Pedagogy and curriculums lagged. "Reading for practical purposes" strained the older "reading for persuasion and debate" based curriculum. Additionally, the older method held more prestige because it represented upper class uses of language. As a result, curriculums clung to the more prestigious forms at the expense of their students' needs. This curriculum is still visible today in High School English classes that emphasize the reading of literature over the reading of informational text. Indeed, the reading of informational text is often relegated to "remedial" classes. This has contributed to a widening gap between reading content and the real world of students.

At the same time, new fields of “social” sciences pronounced themselves. Among these were sociology, psychology, and education. Schools became a primary playing field for these new theories. Two of the most common learning theories, for example, still taught in education programs today are Behaviorism--the pre-programmed, stimulus-response biological unit--and Piaget Developmentalism--the pre-programmed, unfolding biological unit. Piaget, by the way, was trained as a Zoologist. Behaviorism is the direct descendant of Wundtian psychology, which pronounced people as “soulless” during the late 1800’s.

Since the mid-seventies these kinds of theories have been charged with actually creating learning failures. There is a growing body of data to support these allegations. For example, in examining the case of Special Education, the off-spring of psychology, Special Education programs have one of the lowest success rates of any federally-funded program in the nation. Fewer than 30% of Special Education students actually graduate. Special Education programs also have an over-representation of minorities in it. Minorities are ten times as likely to be labeled “developmentally delayed,” “emotionally disturbed,” or “learning disabled.”

Biologically or medically-based theories judge these students as inherently or genetically inferior. That is, they place the blame for failure to learn on the students themselves. Sociology and Psychology and Psychiatry tell us that these children cannot learn to read because most of them come from dysfunctional families, alcoholic parents, single-parent families, poverty, non-English speaking backgrounds. According to these disciplines, reading failures are due to something other than reading methods themselves.

The United States, by the way, is one of the few countries of the world that has “dyslexia,” “learning disabled,” and attention deficit disorder.” Based upon the theories that have given us these disorders, we might assume that Americans are genetically inferior. These assumptions create problems when schools, communities, and teachers care about the survival of their students. Solutions, then, must lie outside of these disciplines.

Exercises

1. Make a list of ideas you learned in your teacher training. What part of these ideas seem to reflect medical or biological-based theories?
2. From your own teaching experience, make a list of successful teaching actions.

Further Reading

Citizen's Commission on Human Rights. (1990). *Psychiatry's betrayal*. (Available from CCHR, 6362 Hollywood Blvd., Suite B, Los Angeles, CA 90028.

Committee for the Protection of Patient's Rights. (1978). *How to handle the hyperactive child*. (Available from CPPR, PO Box 10134, Clearwater, FL 33517).

Cummins, J. (1991, Spring). Preventing pedagogically-induced learning difficulties among indigenous students, *Journal of Navajo Education*, pp. 3-9.

Lionni, P. & Class, L.J. (1980). *The Leipzig connection*. Portland, OR: Heron Books.

The Merrow Report. (1995). *Attention deficit disorder: A dubious diagnosis*. (Available from SCE-TV Marketing, Box 1100, Columbia, SC 29211.

Technology and More Economics

Technology has created greater demands on literacy than ever before. There are now more ways than ever to use written language (see chart below).

Language Uses

	Oral	Written
Home/Community	conversations directions story-telling informal arguments/ discussion gossip jokes prayers songs	notes lists newspapers magazines novels children's books cards/letters menus/directories advertisements T-shirts labels recipes how-to books self-help books
School	directions questions/answers group discussions informal conversations speeches/lectures drama	directions literature textbooks tests/quizzes informal notes outlines/notes copying compositions
Electronic media	telephones television/videos radio tapes/records/ disks	email faxes computers texting
Professional	dialogs presentations directions taking information/ questions/answers	memos business letters research articles legal briefs newsletters directions/tests essays resumes blogs

However, curriculum and reading methods show little indication of the growing variety of uses of written language. In many ways, school uses of language remain disconnected from real uses of language. Even between written school uses of language and professional uses of language, there is no obvious connection. There is sometimes less overlap between written uses of language in the home and the community and school uses of language. This presents particular disconnection for students coming from homes that value community involvement, such as found in rural Native American and Hispanic communities in New Mexico or in rural African American communities in the South.

Additionally, there are now more ideas and information than any school can possibly disseminate in twelve years. Technology has created specialized bodies of data, all of which require specialized training to understand and achieve professionalism. In fact, the ETS has become hard-pressed to keep their tests current. The same holds true for state-licensing boards. Because of this, for almost thirty years businesses and industries have been asking schools to focus on problem-solving and communication skills as well as literacy, not information. In actuality, the largest job market has become services, such as fast-food chains, hotels, maid service, and day care, all of which require good oral communication or proficiency in oral language uses.

Growing inequities in educational funding add further nuances to literacy instruction. There are vast inequities in funding of public education in this country that allow some districts to appropriate as much as \$6,000 per year per student while others function with as little as \$1300 per year per student. Upper-class children attend exclusive private schools or restricted public schools. These schools provide curriculums “culturally sensitive” to that group of students. Growing numbers of middle-class children are failing in public schools. As a result, many middle-class families opt for private education or the fast-growing movement of home-schooling. For many communities, public education means the education of the impoverished and/or linguistically/culturally different student. Few current curriculums and reading methods

are designed to bring these two groups--schools and lower-income communities-- together to guarantee success.

Exercises

1. List all the ways you personally use technology.
2. Make a list of the ways you personally use language in different settings.
3. Observe your students and make a list of the ways they use language in school. List ways they use language in their community. Compare the two lists.

Further Reading

Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown Pub.

Micheal, S. & Collins, J. (1984). Oral discourse styles: Classroom interactions and the acquisition of literacy. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Coherence in spoken & written discourse* (pp. 219-244). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Ohmann, R. (1985). Literacy, technology, and monopoly capital. *College English*, 47, 675-689.

Saville-Troike, M. (1989). *The ethnography of communication: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Scollon, R. & Scollon, S.B.K. (1984). Cooking it up and boiling it down: Abstracts in Athabaskan children's story retellings. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Coherence in spoken and written discourse* (pp. 173-197). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Review of Current Reading Methods

This section describes and analyzes major approaches to reading currently being advocated in this country: Phonics, Basal, Literature-Based, and Whole Language/Language Arts. While all of these employ some important principles for learning to read, none have proven to be completely successful.

Phonics

Phonics is an adaptation of the Greek Alphabet method. Introduced about a hundred years ago, it was an early pedagogical attempt to teach reading to working-class children in Great Britain. It attempts a systematic approach of sound-symbol relationship from the simplest to the most complex. Readers are devised to introduce these relationships in a gradient or step-by-step manner.

This approach is problematic for a number of reasons, the first being the complexity of the sound-system relationship of English itself. English is a Germanic language that is written with the Roman alphabet (based upon the Greek). For example, there are five basic letters to indicate vowel sounds whereas there are fifteen possible vowel sounds in American English. Additionally, during the Norman occupation of Great Britain, the English language borrowed thousands of French words. Hence, English has two consonant sounds for the letter “c”, one Germanic in origin and the other French.

All in all, there are an estimated two hundred plus phonics rules and all their exceptions that a child must master just to decode the sound-system relationship. An additional problem enters when a child does not have the same sound system for English as the “standard” one. For example, many dialects of U.S. English do not differentiate the vowel sound in “pen” and “pin.” For some of us, these sounds are the same. By contrast, Spanish has only five vowels; Navajo

has long, short, and nasalized qualities to their vowels; Chinese have tones. These children can find a phonics approach quite confusing.

Finally, the sole-emphasis on the sound-symbol relationship leaves some children believing that “reading is pronouncing the words correctly.” In younger children this approach produces more failures than successes. Generally, it works better with youth and adults. This may be because of the greater vocabulary and language knowledge that this group possesses along with a greater ability to utilize systematic approaches. Many parents, of course, use some phonics when working with young children while they read. “What sound does a “d” make?” Go ahead, you can sound that out.”

If you learned to read using this approach, then obviously you were one of the successes. It is not a question of whether students need this information; they do. Their question is what else do they need in addition to phonics to learn to understand what they are reading.

Basals

Dating from the Depression, basal readers came about because of the perceived failure of Phonics. This approach uses structured readers, progressing from the most common to the least common vocabulary. These programs are sometimes accompanied by word lists that students are encouraged to “recognize.” This is the *Dick and Jane* series: “Look at Spot. Run, Spot, run.” Readers come with workbooks that use pattern sentences and “fill-in the blank” exercises.

One immediate drawback to these is the stilted and unnatural, and indeed sometimes ungrammatical, sentences employed in these readers and their companion workbooks. After spending five years being exposed to language in its most natural contexts, such as conversations, story-telling, along with the life-like television and movies, children are now asked to gear down to nonsensical, unnatural language.

Children who come from different language backgrounds can be handicapped by exposure to this kind of artificial English. As has been noted in the field of ESL instruction, this

kind of limited and unreal language use almost guarantees limited English proficiency. Children who come from different dialectal English-speaking backgrounds, such as Appalachian English, Black English, Indian English, have great difficulty in relating this variety of English to theirs.

Also, the "flash card" approach associated with learning sight words speaks of a stimulus-response theory. Children are literally asked only to recognize a word, not understand its meaning. I can only imagine going to a brain surgeon who learned just to "recognize" medical terminology. By and large, basal readers and the "sight word" approach have done little better than Phonics. These two approaches battle it out on a continual basis in many school districts while reading scores continue to decline.

Literature-Based

While these two new "scientific" approaches to learning to read remained in competition in many public schools, some schools continued using a literature approach to reading. Remember, this is what children read before psychology stepped in. In fact, at least one major textbook company has continued to produce literature-based reading programs throughout the new innovations. Literature-based reading programs have the advantage of presenting reading in an interesting and natural form, in the form of stories.

Linguists, from another new "science," claim that narratives or stories are a natural, pragmatic use of language. All cultures have stories and story structures. Some linguists now say that having reading presented in story form adds much needed clues for decoding new language. In fact, many children at an early age are able to sequence pictures to form a "plot." What linguists are suggesting is that because children understand how stories work, they use this as an additional clue for understanding what they are reading.

In fact, this may be the only context in which "context" clues ever work. I can pretty well guarantee that if you encounter the word "cerebral" in this sentence that you will find virtually

no clues to its meaning. I can also vouch from experience that even in novels, the best I can do is some kind of general meaning. An example of this is the word "curlew," which I encountered many times in *Love in the Time of Cholera*. I was able to correctly guess that it was some kind of bird because it sang. But I missed the richness of the author's description because I was completely unable to visualize it.

The literature approach has hitherto remained quite elitist. With the urging of people like Donald Graves, a specialist on children's writing, schools with "non-traditional" populations have begun to implement this approach. Results are inconclusive. Additionally, there is evidence that indicates that the reading of novels differs somewhat from the reading of a technical manual. Remember that the need in business and technology is "practical" reading, that is reading for information and use.

Whole Language/Language Arts

Whole Language/Language Arts is primarily the baby of the Ken and Yetta Goodman. It began as a bilingual language teaching approach. Basically, it means presenting language in its entirety, or whole. This definition can be all encompassing and, therefore, probably overwhelming to many teachers. Ken Goodman further advocates using "real" language and the language of the children themselves to begin building literacy.

Goodman is not opposed to teaching any components of language, such as the sound-symbol relationship or grammar. He simply would like for the lessons to have immediate relevance to a student's reading. Some teachers take to this like a duck to water. Others pull their hair in complete confusion. Despite its broad definition, this "whole" approach has the advantage of teaching reading and writing together and includes an oral language component. Additionally, it is the first reading approach that acknowledges that **quantity** of reading is part of the key to reading success.

Given that the business community has been screaming for thirty years for better communication skills among high school graduates, this approach seems to fit the bill. Within Whole Language classrooms, students are allowed to talk to each other and discuss ideas. Conversations are one of those "real" uses of language that Goodman talks about. Unfortunately, while calling itself a "meaning-based" approach, Whole Language texts are as vague as any others in telling us how to get students to understand texts, particularly informational texts. After all, understanding the ideas and getting information is what we want from reading.

Conclusion

Consequently, after close to a hundred years of "scientific" input from sociology, psychology, and education, we still don't know "why Johnny can't read." Blaming the "biological unit" does not produce results. Blaming the parents does not produce results. Using any of the current approaches does not produce uniform results. Clearly something has been missed. The mushiest area in reading remains the one of how to build meaning, or concepts, or understanding for students. This remains the "Black Hole" of reading programs.

Exercises

1. From the various approaches to reading, list the good points of each; for example, phonics teaches the sound-symbol relationship.
2. Use the list you just made to assess your own approach to reading or your school's approach to reading.

Further Reading

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language?*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Gunderson, L. (1991). *ESL literacy instruction* (pp. 1-20). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Matthews, M.M. (1966). *Teaching to read: Historically considered*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Barriers to Reading/Why Study?

To study means to approach learning in a systematic way for some purpose. Or put more simply, to study means to learn new things. Studying can involve observing, listening, asking questions, reading books, experimenting. Schools would seem a perfect place for the subject of study. However, there is not usually even one course in teacher preparation programs that addresses this subject.

Why do we need a course in how to study? Well, for one thing, even though children come to us wanting to learn, we know that something prevents them from learning as much as they could. This section addresses what prevents students from learning and how to remedy those situations. It also explains why students fail tests and cannot read for practical purposes.

Of course, the first barrier to learning is believing you know it all already. Also, some students only “study” to pass the tests. A student really needs both something to study and a purpose for studying it. In fact, having this purpose for study is the beginning of putting a student’s study into both a personal and culturally appropriate context.

Exercises

1. In a short composition, describe something you studied because you had a real purpose for learning it.
2. Find a real purpose for studying each of these subjects:
 - (a) history,
 - (b) math,
 - (c) science, and
 - (d) literature.

The Relationship of Words to Reality/Building Concepts

Words represent real things; they represent reality. This seems so basic that it may seem silly to even mention it. However, forgetting this basic can have very negative consequences for anyone trying to learn to read. Children who are learning to speak are able to do so partly because the language they are “studying,” i.e. observing and listening, is context-bound. This means that the language they learn is that language which is directly related to the reality it represents.

Maria Montessori used this principle to ease young children into literacy by “labeling” real objects in their classrooms. This principle is also applied via a substitute, pictures, in “picture” books for beginning readers. Its application, however, is inconsistent, and in many classrooms students are presented with large quantities of language, i.e. words, for which they have no reality.

No true understanding can occur without some representation of what a word represents. No concept can be built. Can you imagine trying to teach someone how to sew without any cloth, any needles, any thread, or any pins? If you were to try this, your students would begin to feel quite ill. Studying something without some representation of its reality can cause students to have physical reactions. Some of these reactions include a stomachache, eyes that hurt, a headache, dizziness, and/or feeling squashed.

Obviously, the real thing is the best remedy, but pictures do help. Models or clay representations can be a substitute. If none of these are available, then the ideas can be demonstrated by almost anything else in the room. In actuality, it is the *mass*, or the density/weight/concreteness, which the student needs.

One way to use the idea of adding mass is for each student to have a demonstration or “demo” kit. This can be a collection of his/her favorite rocks, shells, erasers, or whatever.

Whenever, a student needs to get the “reality, “ he/she can work it out or demonstrate it with this kit. This approach has the further benefit of consulting a student’s understanding by allowing each student to bring his/her personal/cultural experiences to the learning process. It actively involves each student in learning and understanding.

Sometimes drawing a picture or diagram helps too. This also consults a student’s understanding of what he/she is learning and allows each student to place that new concept within an appropriate individual and cultural context. In actuality, diagrams and pictures are one of the ways that mathematicians, scientists, and engineers solve problems. An old engineering rule is *if you cannot demonstrate something in two dimensions, you have it wrong*.

Adding mass moves a student of any age from a concrete one-to-one relationship to an abstract concept. Adding the mass of reality helps complete this process. This is especially important for students who are reading about things not in their immediate environment or from their immediate experience. An example of this is the word *subway*. Lack of reality on new vocabulary creates these reading and learning failures. This technique works particularly well for “learning disabled” and “ADD” students. It also makes sense that beginning readers learn to read faster when they are reading about something for which they already have mass. This serves as the basis for “culturally” appropriate reading materials, or reading materials that represent a reality a beginning reader already shares.

This approach might be confused with “kinesthetic” or “hands-on” learning, but actually encompasses a generality of learning that those labels miss. How much and when students need more mass and reality varies individually. But all of us need it, particularly when we are learning something for the very first time. Have you ever noticed how dull-looking your students are after long periods of reading? Notice how they brighten up when they are asked to “do” something. Unfortunately, too many schools let students get by with simply “reciting” the words without having to demonstrate any real understanding. Real understanding lies in knowing and demonstrating the reality the words represent.

Exercises

1. In a short composition, describe a time you learned something with the real thing or things.

2. In each of the readings below, list all the ways you could add mass/reality for your students. How will you consult each student's understanding?

(A) History text:

After the massacre in Florida, the French moved far north, to the region that is now Canada. There they stuck to fishing, fur trapping, and trading. Frenchmen had been doing that in America since the beginning of the 16th Century.

(B) Science text:

Spiders aren't insects. They are arachnids, closely related to ticks and scorpions that, like them, have eight legs and no antennae. (Insects have six legs and a pair of antennae.)

(C) Math problem:

The total land area of the earth is approximately 52,425,000 square miles. What is the land area to the nearest million square miles?

3. Assemble your own collections of things for a demonstration kit. Demonstrate one idea from this course. What happened?

4. Observe your students. If you see one who looks squashed or dizzy, find out what the student was working on. Help him/her get more mass/reality. Write down what happened.

5. Design a lesson that provides adequate mass or reality for a reading.

Step-by-Step Approaches

A second barrier to study is too steep of a gradient. A gradient is a step-by-step approach to learning. Usually, this involves doing something. Let's go back to teaching students how to sew. You probably would not give beginning students a project of a silk suit because that would be too complicated. In many classes, the first project is something like pillowcases with simple cutting and simple seams.

When students hit this barrier--the steps may be too big or a step left out, they become confused. The remedy is to find out what the student was working on **before** he became confused. Usually the confusion can be found in a step that the student felt he/she understood well. Unfortunately, textbook producers and writers seem to know nothing about this barrier. How many times have you had to clear up some student's confusion because the text left a step out?

This barrier also explains why students fail beginning around the fourth grade. Did you know that most social studies and science textbooks for fourth grade are actually at a sixth grade reading level? What would you predict would happen in fourth grade to a student reading at grade level at the end of third grade? below grade level? This principle also plays an important role in how Native American children learn traditional activities. Adults are usually careful not to give them too much too fast. The student takes the learning gradually and masters each step before he/she goes on to the next one.

Exercises

1. Choose something you can do well. Write down all the steps so someone else can do it.
2. Describe what you would do if one of your students said he/she felt confused.

3. Design a lesson that involves reading that teaches a student how to do something on a gradient.

The Importance of Definitions for Understanding

The most important barrier to study is called the *misunderstood* word. *Mis* means not or wrong. Many reading experts in the past have made statements like “if a child is reading at grade level, he/she will have 80% comprehension.” Do you want your doctor, lawyer, mechanic to have 80% comprehension of their professions? Eighty percent is not practical or professional. It is mediocre at best.

Going past a wrong definition or a word that isn't understood also causes physical reactions. It makes the student feel “blank” or not-there. A student actually begins to feel a kind of anxiety. The accumulation of too many of these is the basis for stupidity, for low test scores, for an apparent lack of aptitude. Yes, there is such a thing as talent, but the realization of talent can be prevented by too many misunderstood words. This is what prevents our students from “getting” the information and from applying or using what they have read.

Except in rare cases, most words in English have multiple meanings. Students need to be made aware of this and taught how to use a dictionary as soon as they can read well enough to do so. If a child has 80% comprehension the first year, what will be that child's comprehension the second year, or the third? Students rarely remain at a constant level throughout their schooling. What we know statistically is that many students' reading gets worse each year.

We also know that children who are locked out of success in reading are more likely to wind up alcoholics, drug users, criminals, and gang members. These statistics alone should make all of us more willing to take the time to help students achieve complete understanding and success in school.

There are two phenomena associated with this barrier of wrong or missing definitions. The first phenomenon occurs when the student misses understanding a word. The section right after that is blank in his memory.

The remedy is for the student to go back just **before** the blank, find the word, and get it understood. The blankness goes away.

The second phenomenon occurs when a student has accumulated too many undefined or wrongly understood words. The student will leave the study. This leaving is called a *blow*. The exact sequence is (1) the student goes into a blankness or non-comprehension, (2) the student *individuates* or tries to separate him/herself from what is being studied, and (3) the student develops an attitude which allows him/her to do something harmful to someone or something. This is the student who loses textbooks, bad-mouths the teacher, or vandalizes the school.

People are, however, basically good, and most students will try to remove themselves rather than hurt someone else. Unfortunately, compulsory education laws require students to remain in school until about age 16 or 18. Students who stay in school may develop mechanisms that allow them to pass tests without any real understanding of what they have studied. These are the students who “test” well, but cannot apply any of the ideas. I think this is the basis for jokes about Ph.D.’s.

Basically, the dull student and the bright student who cannot apply ideas suffer from the same problem--**no definitions, wrong definitions, invented definitions, incomplete definitions, unsuitable definitions, homonymic definitions, synonomic definitions, rejected definitions**. Initial success in reading can be facilitated by having beginning readers read words and materials for which they already have definitions. In fact, this is the basis for arguments to teach bilingual children to read in their dominant language. They learn to read faster if they already know what the words mean.

Steps for Building Comprehension

If you want your students to really learn and really understand what they are studying, these are the steps for “clearing” words. Clearing here means making something crystal clear--totally understood.

1. Always use a dictionary. It should be simple enough that the definition can be easily understood. (*Webster’s Seventh Collegiate* is one of the worst. You practically have to know the definition to understand the definition.)

2. When a student goes blank or comes to a word not fully understood, then have the student find the word in the dictionary. (Teachers can give the definition to younger students in language they can understand.) The student looks over the definitions and finds the one that applies to the way the word is used in the text. S/he reads and understands the definition. The student makes up sentences using the word with that definition until the student has a clear concept of the meaning of the word. This might require ten or more sentences. If a student is having difficulty, the teacher or another student can provide model sentences.

3. Then have the student, if older, do the same with all the other common definitions, using each in sentences. Younger students may feel overwhelmed by this so this procedure is not recommended for them.

The above is done quickly and orally. When the student is done, s/he needs to reread the material for full understanding.

Having the student use the word in his/her own sentences makes the new word a part of that student’s language. This process also consults the student’s understanding and allows the student to bring his/her reality to the understanding. Allowing student understanding and reality provides appropriate cultural context for learning for students. In actuality, then teachers and students work in partnership: The teacher provides the how; the student provides the what.

Exercise

Find a student who looks blank while studying. Find that student's misunderstood word. *Clear* the student on the definition. Write down what happened.

Why Use This Approach

Don't have time, you say, to train your students to do this. Maybe you want to reconsider the investment. In Washington, D.C. with inner-city kids, a 40-hour tutorial program in this approach to study for students increased the number of students reading at or above grade level from 46% to 80%. In London, after a 12-day program, one class gained an average of 1.29 year higher in reading levels. In Africa, one program for Black Africans increased their pass rate from 27% to 91%.

Of course, students who are hungry, tired, ill, or drugged also cannot learn. Students can come to class already upset. Students who believe they know it all already cannot learn: In fact, this is the first barrier to learning. Despite this, there is something that teachers can do. Teachers can help students learn how to study.

This could easily be the most important gift you give. In actuality, students begin to literally "fly" through their reading once they understand how easy it is to learn this way. Yes, it is an investment on a teacher's part, on a school's part. Our children are our future. The northern Athabaskans have a saying, "for our children's children." What kind of a future would you like?

Exercises

1. Take the following vocabulary test.

Vocabulary Test

(1) In the passage below, write the correct definition for the underlined words.

Language teachers recognize that words have meanings only if they bring to mind visible or tangible objects. Consequently, some teachers have turned to scientific observations

and simple laboratory experiments to take advantage of their immediacy and practicality-
-ideal features for language instruction.

(2) Check your definitions with a dictionary. Clear any words that you missed.

(3) Which gave you the most difficulty, the big words or the little words?

(4) Rewrite the passage into your own language (paraphrase).

2. a. You have a student who appears stupid or blank often while reading directions. What should you do?

b. You are a counselor or principal. This is the third time a student has been referred to you for disrupting class. The student is not hungry, tired, or drugged. When checking the student's test scores, the student is at the bottom of his/her class. What do you suspect? What do you recommend?

c. You have a student who always "tests" well but can't seem to *do* anything. What should you check for?

3. Take a lesson from your class. Pre-teach the key vocabulary using "how to clear a word."

4. Many English words borrowed from French work with prefixes and suffixes. Design word lessons appropriate for your grade level to teach these relationships. (Suggestion: final "s" and "ed" could be included in this--also use words from students' reading. See the sample word chart below.)

verb	noun	adjective	adverb
	beauty	beautiful	beautifully
create	creator	creative	creatively
greet	greeter	(greetive)*	(greetively)*

*not common but allowable under existing grammar rules

Present Form

create(s)

teach(es)

Past Form

created

taught

5. Describe how you could teach students to find and handle their own misunderstood words.

Further Reading

Cummins, J. (1992). The empowerment of Indian students. In J. Reyhner (Ed.), *Teaching American Indian students* (pp. 3-12). Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Hubbard, L.R. (1990). *Basic Study Manual*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and language* (E. Hantmann & G. Vakar, trans.). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Unit Two--Responding to Written Material

Application

The only real test of any person's education is what s/he can *do* with it. We all know people who can pass tests but who cannot apply what they have studied. The *Albuquerque Sunday Journal* recently reported a case of an anesthesiologist who passed his exams very well but who allowed a child to die because he failed to apply what he had studied. Application is also the key to concept building and problem-solving. Students only learn what they themselves can use.

There are, perhaps, two ways to look at schooling: one, the memorization of facts, or, two, reasoning from those facts. Reasoning has always been central to Native American learning. A person's survival was dependent upon being able to reason from information. Northern Athabaskans, for example, used to give their children riddles to build such reasoning. Reasoning is also the basis for problem-solving. Having students do something with ideas or apply ideas to real situations builds problem-solving abilities.

Application also brings students towards professionalism in their studies. Native Americans have always valued professionalism among their own people. A community member who does something particularly well, such as making piki bread, or drums, is often honored by other members of the community. That person is the one who is asked to do those activities, particularly during a ceremony. And if a person wants to learn about that activity, the "professional" is the one others are referred to.

Exercise:

Design a "practical" that requires students to use/apply something they have learned.

Further Reading

Applied Scholastics. (1990). *Quality education*. (Available from Applied Scholastics, International, 7060 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 200, Los Angeles, CA 90028.)

Applied Scholastics. (1989). *Educational reference pack*. (Available from above address.)

Romero, M.E. (1992). *Defining "giftedness" among Keresan*. (Available from M.E. Romero, Santa Fe Indian School, Santa Fe, New Mexico.)

Written Assignments

Students need to use both ideas and the language representing the ideas for learning and development of reasoning to take place.

UNDERSTANDING of reading--->DOING--->Writing/Speaking---->Ownership

This process completes the learning cycle for the student. It additionally adds the necessary balance between in-flow of information and out-flow of information. Having students use both ideas and language allows students to become better communicators about what they have learned.

School Writing

Informal

journals

logs/science data

letters to editors

personal letters

Formal

summary

essays/reports

arguments

business letters

Creative

poetry

short stories

drama

film scripts

Included in this section are additional hints for teaching writing with reading. Because writing is a “doingness,” the application of a proper gradient becomes very useful for building success.

Beginning Writing and Beginning Reading/Emergent Literacy

Most parents include their infants and toddlers in spoken language from an early age. However, research indicates that including infants and toddlers in literate language events also assists young children in becoming readers and writers. Holding a young child in your lap and reading to him or her creates a positive attitude toward print. Also, reminding the child of how print represents life conveys the idea that print carries meaning.

“Look, there’s a Blackie,” says the mother when they see a black, shaggy dog like the one in a book the child is familiar with.

Also, a child who sees his/her parent reading gets the idea that reading is something that adults do, and most children want to grow up to be adults. And young children always want to write. Consider ways that you as an adult can engage young children in literate uses of language.

Reading

Pointing out and “reading” signs to children
When reading books, asking child questions about the pictures—which picture shows a cow?
Write daily messages to child and read it to him/her
Take the child to the library to pick out his/her own books

Writing

Give children plastic magnet letters and allow them to make words
Let child trace over words
Allow child to write his/her own daily messages
Help the child create his/her own books or provide books of pictures for which the child can add print.

The purpose of these early literate language activities is to show children that print carries meaning and that print can be used to create meaning. And these activities work for any language.

School Age Children

Many educators believe that having children write stories and reports is an aid to their reading. The basic premise is that if the child creates the print s/he will be able to read it. Another variation of this is to have the child dictate the text to an adult and then have the child read the dictated text. In this way, a child is simply learning that print represents words, and in this case the words are familiar to the child. This avoids the added burden of having to learn new words while having to learn the relationship between print and sounds. And this is less artificial method than the phonics approach.

Exercise

Design a lesson for beginning or weak readers that includes writing.

Children as Authors

One method for engaging people of any age in reading and writing is to have them view themselves as authors. Some classrooms provide an author's corner, a place where writers can "publish" themselves in a variety of manners, such as reading their compositions to their writing groups or even putting their compositions on display for others to read. A classroom can have a special shelf for student generated "books" that others can read. Also, students can read their "books" to younger children.

Exercise

Design a lesson that will allow your students to see themselves as authors. What are the exact steps you would use?

Children as Scientists and Writing

There are three basic barriers to learning science: (1) not having the real thing or things to study; (2) nomenclature, or language of science; and (3) teaching too much too fast, or going

too slowly for the student. The first barrier argues for teaching children how to become scientists. Scientists do a variety of things. First, they observe, collect, and record. Second, they also experiment and record, illustrate, theorize, and speak and write about their findings. If a child cannot find or observe the real thing, then models may be provided. However, all children learn better if they construct the models themselves: People only learn what they themselves use.

Scientific language represents a very precise use of terminology. Even young children are able to learn scientific terminology if it is learned in the context of the real thing and doing something with the language and the real things that language stand for. Language, like ideas, is only learned when used. Children also appreciate understandable definitions. They rely on adults to fill in the meanings of new words. Older children can be taught to use glossaries and dictionaries to build a more precise vocabulary. Why settle for the 80% predicted by psychologists? Why not give children 100% comprehension?

The third barrier is an argument for student-centered programs: The child informs the adult when he/she has "got it." In this suggested context, an informed adult becomes a mentor and facilitator for learning. Using this approach places the discovery of science central to a classroom curriculum. In fact, an entire thematic unit could be constructed around the study of science because it involves writing and speaking; it involves reading, it involves art to illustrate and construct models; it could easily involve literature from stories told by many groups and including poetry written by scientists; and it could include history to trace the ever-changing thinking of people of whatever topic is being studied.

Most importantly these approaches allow children to take responsibility for their own learning. Because science is not static but everchanging, teaching children how to discover, how to theorize, and how to present findings better prepares them for a future in a modern technological culture.

Further Reading

Clay, M.M. (1975). *What did I write? Beginning writing behavior*. Auckland: Heinemann.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Graves, D. (1989). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hubbard, L.R. (1990). *The basic study manual*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.

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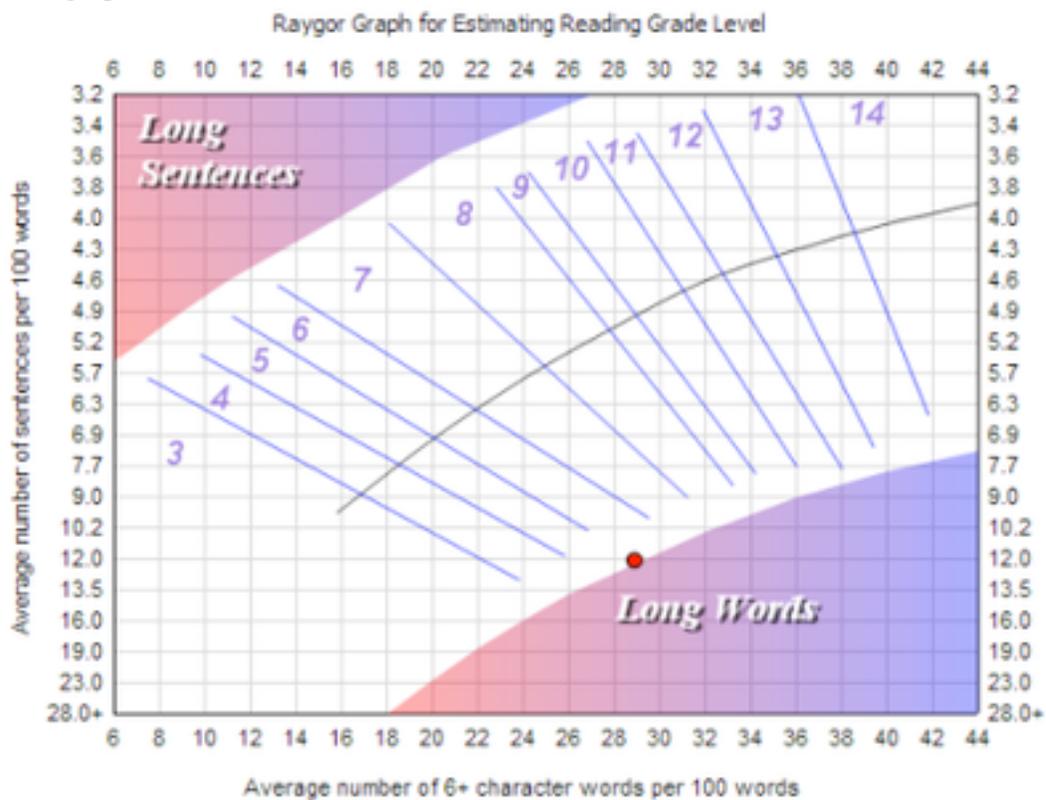
Natural History (published by the Natural History Museum, Washington, D.C.)

Unit Three--Assessment and Coaching

This section deals mostly with ways classroom teachers can make judgments regarding how a student reads. The first part deals directly with reading: determining readability of a particular text, using an actual text to make a reading test, and using oral reading as a quick estimate of a student's reading. This unit additionally contains ways to improve a student's ability to learn.

Readability

There are several formulas for determining readability. One of the easiest is Raygor's. While readability formulas do not tell the entire story, they are very useful for choosing texts that will best suit your classroom needs. The directions for determining readability are at the bottom of the graph.



en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raygor_Readability_Estimate

Expanded Directions for Working Readability Graph

1. Randomly select three (3) sample passages and count out exactly 100 words each, beginning with the beginning of a sentence. Do not count proper nouns, initializations, and numerals.
2. Count the number of sentences in the hundred words, estimating length of the fraction of the last sentence to the nearest one-tenth.
3. Count the total number of syllables in the 100-word passage. If you don't have a hand counter available, an easy way is to simply put a mark above every syllable over one in each word; then when you get to the end of the passage, count the number of marks and add 100. Small calculators can also be used as counters by pushing numeral 1, then push the + sign for each word or syllable when counting.
4. Enter graph with *average* sentence length and *average* number of syllables: plot dot where the two lines intersect. Area where dot is plotted will give you the approximate grade level.
5. If a great deal of variability is found in syllable count or sentence count, putting more samples into the average is desirable.
6. A word is defined as a group of symbols with a space on either side: thus, *Joe*, *IRA*, *1945*, and *E* are each one word.
7. A syllable is defined as a phonetic syllable. Generally, there are as many syllables as vowel sounds. For example, *stopped* is one syllable and *wanted* is two syllables. When counting syllables for numerals and initializations, count one syllable for each symbol. For example, *1945* is four syllables, *IRA* is three syllables, and *E* is one syllable.

language.oakland.edu/rdg414/pdf/readabilityworksheets.pdf

Exercise

Find the readability of three texts/literature books you are currently using.

Making your own reading test

One of the easiest ways to make a reliable reading test is to use material from a book that you are actually using or want to use. I suggest you score the readability of the text first.

Procedure

1. Take a passage of 250 running words from one of your texts.
2. Leave the first and last sentences intact.
3. Beginning with the second sentence, delete every 5th word.
4. Type the passage with 15 spaces for each deletion. Type the passage double- or triple-spaced.
5. Score the test by only accepting the exact word that was deleted. (Be certain you make yourself a master.)

Sample Test for adults

T-VI students may have to pay to get convenient parking, President Alex Sanchez said Tuesday at a luncheon sponsored by the Student Leadership Development Council. About 40 T-VI students, _____, and staff attended the _____ during which Sanchez addressed _____ institute's parking problems, which _____ been spurred by the _____ increasing enrollment. Several _____ vented their frustrations _____ Sanchez about everything from _____ inability to park near _____ to problems with parking _____ renovations. Student and T-VI _____ Nathan Kirby said enforcement _____ parking rules at T-VI _____ nonexistent. "We've got people _____ handicapped spaces and entranceways," _____ said, adding that T-VI _____ tickets offenders. "The tail _____ wagging the dog," Kirby _____ . "And the tail in _____ case is the students." _____ Vice Present for Administration _____ Tafoya explained that _____ can tow vehicles out _____ fire lanes and from _____ reserved for the handicapped, _____ it lacks the power _____ to charge students for tickets _____ are issued. But Tafoya _____ that may change. "The _____ committee will go to _____ Legislature and request that _____ be allowed to have _____ where we can write _____ and charge fines for _____," Tafoya said. Sanchez said _____ is available for _____ who don't park next _____ the buildings where their _____ are. "We've got satellite _____ at the stadium with _____ shuttle service that is _____," Sanchez said. Parking lots _____ T-VI's main and Montoya _____ have been

closed for _____ since early fall. Tafoya _____ construction delays have _____ to parking woes. “We had to go through an extra approval step with the Commission for Higher Education because of the size and the dollar amount of the project,” Tafoya said, adding that both lots should be open by January.
(Answers available in Appendix.)

How to Use The Reading Tests You Make

1. Score the tests.
2. Figure percentage correct. For example, $36/46 = 78\%$.
3. Use the following scale for judging student ability to read text.

85-100% student can read text alone with use of dictionary and glossary

60-80% student will need to look up many words but can proceed if allowed to do so at own pace and monitored by instructor for understanding

below 60% this text is too difficult for the student without one-to-one coaching

Exercises

1. Take the sample test so you have the student's reality.

Check yourself.

Figure your percentage. How well did you do?

2. Make a reading test from a text with a known readability (a text for which you have determined the readability).

Administer it to a number of students.

Determine their abilities to read the text.

A variation of the above reading test involves giving the student three choices for each blank, only one of which is correct. Take this sample test.

Sample Test

In the following passage, circle the word that best fits each blank.

Some fifty years ago, when Latin was a required subject of study in many American high schools, students often expressed their attitude toward this academic exercise with the little ditty:

Latin is a language

As dead as it can be

First it killed the Romans

And now it's killing me.

Without benefit of any (valuable, technical, minor) expertise or linguistic sophistication, (the, that, a) students who sang this (paragraph, song, text, .)—most with considerable conviction—(know, learn, knew) clearly what was meant (through, by, for) a “dead” language. It (was, appears, seems) a language that existed (finely, only, nevertheless) in its texts. No(one, body, mother) spoke Latin, or wrote(it, something, them) to exchange greetings, to (ask, make, state)for directions, to complain (of, about, for) the weather or the (amount, unfair, increase) in taxes, to interview (dog, sports, medical) heroes, to report the (news, weather, disaster) of the day, to (support, seek, ask) voter support in the (last, corrupt, next) election, to declare that (the, a, of) state of war existed (between, among, in) the United States and (Swaziland, Germany, New Zealand)—in short to do(the, a, some) myriad things, whether trivial (but, or, so) grave, that a “living” (language, person, animal) is ordinarily, and extraordinarily, (consumed, done, used) for. Latin was (and is) (any, sometimes, no) longer a language of (everyday, bad, family) communication among people, young(but, and, some) old, as they carry (out, in, of) their daily affairs. Even (that, some, the) Catholic priest, who then (murmured, used, rejected) Latin as the

language (to, for, of) celebrate the Mass, did (always, and, not) use it to confer (with, in, outside) his parishioners, thereby confirming (that, which, whose) the language had only (no, a, for) ritual, not a social, (idea, assumption, function). And without this social function, this *use* of the language to accomplish the deeds that make up much of the everyday life of a community, there was little real motivation to learn Latin.

Machan, Tim William and Scott, Charles T. 1992. Sociolinguistics, language change, and the history of English. In Machan, Tim William & Charles T. Scott, (Ed.) *English in its social contexts: Essays in historical sociolinguistics*, p. 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Exercise

Construct a new test using the above procedure. Use it with several students. Which style test do you prefer—the one with just blanks or the one that gives the student choices? Why?

Further Reading

Gunderson, L. (1991). Reading Programs. In *ESL Literacy Instruction* (pp. 32-39). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Oral Reading/Assessment and Coaching

Oral reading can be used in two ways. The first is as a quick way to determine how well a student can read a particular text. The procedure is quite simple. Have the student read a paragraph or two. Simply note how often the student stumbles, deletes, or substitutes words for the actual text. The greater the number of errors, the more difficulty the student is having.

Exercise

Have students at various reading levels, read the same passage. Note which students have the greatest difficulty and have them use materials at a lower reading level until you find one that each student can read with only slight assistance with the meanings of words.

Non-readers/Slow readers

Coaching students / One-to-one help

This procedure is recommended for children, non-native speakers of English and anyone else who might have difficulty with the language.

- Both you and the student should have a copy of the same text. As the other person reads aloud follow along in another copy of the text. Amazing things may be observed.
- "Is" may always be omitted. The student never reads it; s/he may have some strange meaning for it, such as an abbreviation for Israel.
- The student may call *green* for *mean*. or say *stop* for *happen*.
- The student may hesitate over certain words.

Coaching Procedure

1. Have the student read aloud.

2. Note each omission, word change, hesitation, or frown as the student reads and takes it up at once.

Example: Student stumbles on *exacerbate*.

Coach asks, "What does *exacerbate* mean?"

Remember that the student may have a misunderstanding on the sound-symbol relationship and may need the correct pronunciation, or student may have wrong definition or no definition.

3. Say the word and give student explanation or correct definition as needed.
4. Have student continue reading until the next omission, word change, hesitation, or frown.
5. Repeat step 2 to 4.

This approach is also good with students who cannot find their own misunderstood words.

Exercise

Take one of the students who made many mistakes during your oral reading assessment. Use this method to help the student gain proficiency in reading.

Increasing Understanding of Written Material

Oral reading can also be used as a method to increase a student's understanding of written material. This approach is a way of coaching students through difficult material. This is particularly good for ESL or Special Education students. The basic theory involved is that duplication must precede understanding. This principle of duplication is inherent in traditional ways of learning. Children would be expected to learn exactly how to make an arrow, for example, as shown. This exact duplication is expected in the training of medicine people as well. After a student has exactly duplicated then s/he can begin to reason through application. That is the true basis for "experiential" learning.

A Coaching Procedure

1. Student and coach sit facing each other. Both have a copy of the material to be learned.
2. The coach has the student read aloud the sentence, rule, definition, or short paragraph to be learned. The coach must ask only for one major thought to be read aloud at a time.
3. When the student has finished reading, the coach acknowledges with “OK,” “fine,” or “thank you,” or something like that. The coach repeats this step until the student reads the material exactly as it is written.

This coaching procedure increases the student’s ability to **duplicate** written material. This is particularly important for so-called *dyslexia* or *learning disabled* students. Please note the importance of having texts at an appropriate readability. If a student has too much difficulty with this step, check for a misunderstood word. If one is found, clear it and the repeat Step 3.

4. Once the student has duplicated the material, the coach asks, “What do you consider that means?” The coach always acknowledges whatever the student gives him.

5. Repeat the above steps until the student duplicates the material to be learned in response to the question “What do you consider that means?”. The coach now asks, “Do you understand that it means?” If the student does not understand or isn’t certain, repeat steps 1-5 until the student is able to both duplicate and understand.

6. Once this is done, the coach takes up the next major thought.

This particular method is great for giving students confidence in themselves because it leaves them with certainty about their understanding. I once used this approach with a young man who routinely became hysterical about the subject of reading. At the beginning of a fifteen-week semester, he was virtually untestable because he became so upset. At the end of fifteen

weeks of coaching twice a week for about 45 minutes, he tested at the 7.6 grade level in reading. He went on to complete a certificate program.

This is so simple that students, even young ones, can do it with each other.

Exercises

1. Work in groups of threes: One person is the coach; one person is the student; one person is the supervisor. In a round robin fashion, each of you do the coaching. Select any material you wish.
2. Find a student who is having difficulty. Coach them on their materials. What happened?
3. Design a way to train your students to do this with each other. Implement your plan.

Further Reading

(The above data is taken from the 1972 edition from the *Basic Study Manual*.)

Spot Checking

One of the fastest ways to find out how a student is doing is to simply pick up the material a student is working on and spot check for understanding. This is done by asking the definitions of key terms and demonstrations of key ideas. If a student flunks any part of this, then the student must look up any and all words not understood and restudy. This is not extensive or exhaustive. It is what it says, a *spot* check. Do this for two or three key words. If a student has it, let him/her get on with their learning.

This procedure allows the instructor to maintain good control of learning in his/her classroom. As this is done at random, students soon become more responsible for monitoring their own learning.

Exercise

Spot check another student on their materials on this course. Write up what happened.

Standardized tests

If you work with Native American, Hispanic, or African-American students (or even girls), standardized tests are weighted against them. However, this does not mean that your students cannot do well. There are two keys to creating better test scores: (1) increasing reading comprehension and (2) increasing your students' certainty about their own learning. You have already learned ways to handle both of these.

Exercise:

Use the clearing of words and coaching with your students on samples from a standardized test. Write down what happened.

Tests tell you what a student knows and where the student still needs instruction. It can help you spot earlier misunderstood words. For example, a math test can tell you that a student understands quadratic equations but not his/her multiplication tables. When you find this out, you can give the student exactly what s/he needs to move on. From actual experience, I can tell you that simply clearing earlier misunderstood words can open all kinds of new pathways and accelerate learning in a subject. You can restore a person's ability in a relatively short time.

Exercise

Take a student's test scores (from any test). Find out where the student needs instruction. Write a program for that student which will teach him/her what is needed and bring him/her forward to where he/she needs to be.

Unit Four--Program Management

As this could be a whole course within itself, this section simply adds two simple notions. Previous sections have suggested ways that classrooms can be managed so that students are really learning. This section introduces one idea borrowed from business--statistics. This is a way to measure how well you and your students are doing. Some of you may already be using a point system, for instance. Points then become a statistic or a way of measuring how well a student is doing.

Statistics can be graphed. This graph can then tell you and each student exactly how well s/he is doing. I have used a point system this way, having each student graph their individual study points at the end of each class. Students who did homework or took work home then put those points of the next day's graph. This is how it worked.

“Ms. Gregory, what does this red flag on my graph mean?”

“It means you're in trouble and you need to work harder.”

““Ms. Gregory, what does this star mean?””

“It means you have been working really hard. See how your graph is going up?”

This saved me from having to nag students constantly. Yes, some days they worked harder than others, but most of them worked harder for me than any other instructor. These students, by the way, were 80% Native American and all scoring at least two grade levels below in reading.

At the end of each month, if all the student graphs were going up, then we had pizza and a movie. I didn't mind. They had earned it.

Another simpler approach might be the one like the Pizza Hut “Bookit” program. The teacher sets the number of books to be read by each student for each month. The parent and student signs that s/he has read it. Each student who makes his/her quota gets a personal pan pizza. This is a simple way to have students involved in reading for pleasure. This allows them to self-select and also gives them the quantity they need to really master reading.

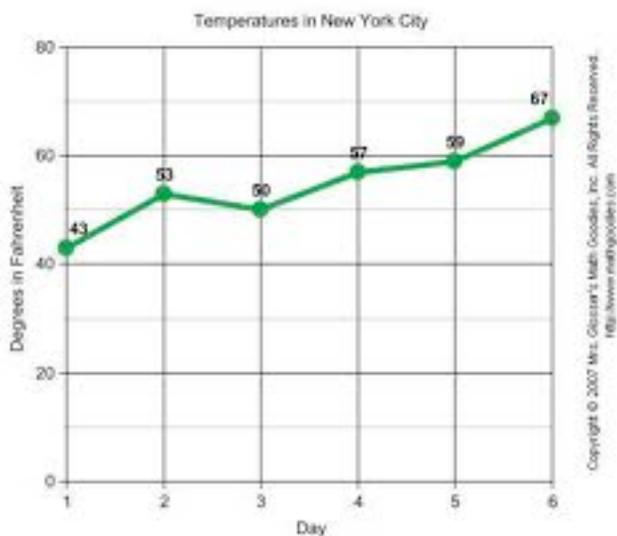
Exercise:

Find a statistic that measures one of your goals for your student's reading.

Reading Graphs of Statistics

You may want each student to keep a graph or you may simply want to keep one for the entire class for one statistic. For example, using the "Bookit" model, your statistic would be the number of students who meet their quota. You would then keep a monthly statistic and a yearly graph. These are line graphs, by the way.

Graphs are read by *trends* so a single week or month won't tell you much.



This example is a graph of temperatures. For student points, put the point on the vertical line and the weeks on the horizontal like

When a student or classroom is in a downward trend then something is not working. The *why* needs to be found and remedied as soon as possible. For example, a student went past several words without looking up their definitions and finally got completely bogged. Or there was a substitute teacher who had the students do something else. Whatever it is, it needs to be found and fixed.

If a student or classroom is in an upward trend, then nothing is changed. Unfortunately, education is guilty of always looking for problems where none exist or simply changing something that is already working.

Exercises:

1. Find a statistics that you can graph for your classroom on a daily basis for a week (number of students who remember to bring a pencil to class, for example.) Determine its trend. Based upon the trend, what course of action should you take--no action or find out what went wrong and fix it?
2. Design a reward system based upon statistical trends.

Targets

Another easy classroom management technique is to simply give each student a *target*, a projection of how much work s/he is to get done during class. This may vary individually and works better if students are working on a project that has a known end, such as a unit. This can also be done for the entire class.

“Class we need to be done with the unit on Weather by the end of the week. This is how much work we need to do each day. If you can’t get it all done that day, you can do some of it at home.” This later gives slower students the option of doing work at home to keep up.

Setting targets has several advantages:

- (1) It lets students know where they are going and how much work they will do along the way, thereby adding some predictability to their learning;
- (2) It allows them to focus on doable, small sections so they don’t get overwhelmed and go into confusion; and
- (3) It makes explicit teacher expectations.

Students who know exactly what is expected of them tend to do better.

Exercise:

Give your students daily targets for a week and keep a journal of the results. How did it go?

Unit Five--Final Practical

As a small group, design a 6-9 week unit of lessons. Include the following components.

Goals: What you want students (school) to have.

Purposes: Why you want these goals.

Policies: Classroom, school, district. Your general operating rules. Ex. All students must bring their own pencils.

Program (the big picture) and including **plans** (the more specific actions) and **projects** . Ex. for classroom teachers this is the curriculum unit.

Program--Reading Beowulf

Plans--(see daily lesson plans)--generally students will read aloud, dramatize, and write about Beowulf.

Projects--(1) Learn some Old English words

(2) Dramatize a favorite scene

(3) Write a modern version

Statistics: How you measure success

Ideal Scene and Valuable Final Products: Write one paragraph describing your ideal scene and the valuable final products that you hope to produce.

Ex. A classroom with everyone learning and students who can use what they learn.

Appendix

Answer Key for First Reading Test

T-VI students may have to pay to get convenient parking, President Alex Sanchez said Tuesday at a luncheon sponsored by the Student Leadership Development Council. About 40 T-VI students, faculty, and staff attended the luncheon during which Sanchez addressed the institute's parking problems, which has been spurred by the current increasing enrollment. Several students vented their frustrations to Sanchez about everything from the inability to park near classes to problems with parking lot renovations. Student and T-VI staff Nathan Kirby said enforcement of parking rules at T-VI were nonexistent. "We've got people in handicapped spaces and entranceways," he said, adding that T-VI never tickets offenders. "The tail is wagging the dog," Kirby said. "And the tail in this case is the students."

The Vice Present for Administration Edward Tafoya explained that security cannot tow vehicles out of fire lanes and from spaces reserved for the handicapped, because it lacks the power now to charge students for tickets that are issued. But Tafoya said that may change. "The Security committee will go to State Legislature and request that they be allowed to have authority where we can write tickets and charge fines for them," Tafoya said.

Sanchez said space is available for those who don't park next to the buildings where their classes are. "We've got satellite parking at the stadium with a shuttle service that is available," Sanchez said. Parking lots at T-VI's main and Montoya campuses have been closed for renovations since early fall. Tafoya said construction delays have added to parking woes. "We had to go through an extra approval step with the Commission for Higher Education because of the size and the dollar amount of the project," Tafoya said, adding that both lots should be open by January.

Answer Key to Second Reading Test

Some fifty years ago, when Latin was a required subject of study in many American high schools, students often expressed their attitude toward this academic exercise with the little ditty:

Latin is a language

As dead as it can be

First it killed the Romans

And now it's killing me.

Without benefit of any (technical) expertise or linguistic sophistication, (the) students who sang this (song) most with considerable conviction—(knew) clearly what was meant (by) a “dead” language. It (was) a language that existed (only) in its texts. No (one) spoke Latin, or wrote (it) to exchange greetings, to (ask) for directions, to complain (about) the weather or the (increase) in taxes, to interview (sports) heroes, to report the (news) of the day, to (seek) voter support in the (next) election, to declare that (a) state of war existed (between) the United States and (Germany)—in short to do (a) myriad things, whether trivial (or) grave, that a “living” (language) is ordinarily, and extraordinarily, (used) for. Latin was (and is) (no) longer a language of (everyday) communication among people, young (and) old, as they carry (out) their daily affairs. Even (the) Catholic priest, who then (used) Latin as the language (to) celebrate the Mass, did (not) use it to confer (with) his parishioners, thereby confirming (that) the language had only (a) ritual, not a social, (function). And without this social function, this *use* of the language to accomplish the deeds that make up much of the everyday life of a community, there was little real motivation to learn Latin.

(Machan, Tim William and Scott, Charles T. 1992. Sociolinguistics, language change, and the history of English. In Machan, Tim William & Charles T. Scott, (Ed.) *English in its*

social contexts: Essays in historical sociolinguistics, p. 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.)